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Towns, Bilbray Introduce JWOD Modernization Act

WASHINGTON – Chairman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) and Rep. Brian Bilbray (R-CA), Oversight and Government Reform Committee member, today announced the introduction of H.R. 5983, The Javits-Wagner-O’Day Act of 2010 (JWOD 2010). JWOD 2010 makes important updates to Javits-Wagner-O’Day Act, also known as “The Ability One Program,” that was signed into law nearly forty years ago. The AbilityOne Program creates employment and training opportunities for people who are blind or who have other significant disabilities, empowering them to lead more productive and independent lives. Its primary means of doing so is by requiring Federal Government agencies to purchase selected products and services from nonprofit organizations employing such individuals.

Chairman Towns and Rep. Bilbray are working to modernize JWOD after finding that the program is falling short of its goal to help people who are blind or have significant disabilities find jobs due to outdated provisions in the 1971 bill.

H.R. 5983 makes important changes to the 1971 JWOD bill to reflect modern references to people who are blind or have significant disabilities and updates the procurement provisions so they are compatible with modern regulations, statutes and procedures. The JWOD 2010 legislation also adds dedicated oversight and compliance personnel within the Committee for Purchase, to ensure the program is running effectively, and establishes an Inspector General for the program. Finally, H.R. 5983 provides the Committee for Purchase and the Central Nonprofits with additional tools to increase employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

“Today is truly an historic day, and I am proud to introduce this long-awaited legislation with Congressman Bilbray to help create vital new job opportunities for people who are blind or have significant disabilities,” said Chairman Towns. “It has been a great honor to work with the National Industries for the Blind and NISH to bring the Javits-Wagner-O’Day Act into the modern age, and I look forward to its passage.”

“I am proud to join with Chairman Towns to introduce H.R. 5983 to revise the

Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act," said Rep. Bilbray. "The Blind and Disabled community is a vibrant segment of our economy and this legislation will ensure their active participation in the government procurement process."

"The enactment of this important legislation will ensure that AbilityOne employees work in an environment that reflects the values of modern disability employment policy and that the AbilityOne Program better serves our Federal customers," said NISH President and CEO Bob Chamberlin. "On behalf of the more than 550 NISH nonprofit agencies across America, I applaud this long-overdue effort and critical step to modernize the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act. This proposal from Chairman Towns and Congressman Bilbray will allow AbilityOne agencies to become more competitive, better aligned with present day disability employment policies, and more successful going forward."

"We look forward to updating and improving the current law which will help NIB fulfill its mission to increase employment and personal independence for people who are blind," said Kevin Lynch, president and CEO of the National Industries for the Blind. "I commend Chairman Towns for his tremendous leadership in introducing legislation to modernize the JWOD Act."

The legislation was referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

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